



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

March 20, 2023

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-64
Streetlighting

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that there is limited information related to processes surrounding Supplemental Appropriation #23-64 Department of Transportation Streetlighting (No. 507055), therefore it is difficult to conclude how this project advances equity in process. Further, while the project is likely to enhance perceptions of public safety and confidence among pedestrians in the project location and has the potential to reduce incidence of crime; there is insufficient evidence to conclude that it will *measurably* increase public safety as pertinent data was not available at the time of this analysis to be able to draw such a conclusion.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #23-64 Department of Transportation Streetlighting (No. 507055) is to allocate funding from a State of Maryland Capital Projects Grant which will fund the installation of pedestrian pathway lighting along the Park Overlook Walking Path to support pedestrian safety in the Rockville area. The funding is designated “for the acquisition, planning, design, construction, repair, renovation, reconstruction, site improvement, and capital equipping of pedestrian streetlights along Park Overlook walking paths”¹. In early 2022, State Delegates generated a bond bill to provide funding for this project to help accelerate its implementation.

¹ State of Maryland Capital Projects Grant Agreement for “Park Overlook Walking”

As with other racial equity impact assessments (REIAs), we apply a racial equity lens to both processes and outcomes to determine potential impacts. There are several ways streetlighting impacts residents' lives and the environment, there are two main categories of impacts—public safety and pedestrian traffic safety. Because this project relates primarily to lighting a walking path between a residential area and Shady Grove metro for safety reasons, the main category we'll focus on is how streetlighting impacts public safety.

A compilation of research published by the Newark Public Safety Collaborative explains many of the theories about where and why crime concentrates in certain geographies, including the impact of environmental risk factors, including lighting². A 2008 meta-analysis of the streetlighting effects found that across 13 studies in the US and UK, the addition of streetlighting reduced crime by 27%³. In a randomized experiment published by Crime Lab New York, lighting reduced outdoor nighttime index crimes by approximately 36 percent and overall index crimes by approximately 4 percent in affected communities⁴. While there's clear evidence about how streetlighting affects crime deterrence, according to a guide produced by the US Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, overall effectiveness of these efforts depends on how the problem is analyzed, how the plan is formulated and implemented, and the extent of community support. Of particular note is the importance of collecting data to compare before and after effects and examine possible displacement and diffusion effects⁵.

Also, given that data specifically about safety issues in this project area was not readily available at the time of this analysis, it's difficult to anticipate the extent to which streetlighting could actually improve public safety; though it is likely—as studies suggest—to create higher levels of reassurance and confidence among pedestrians benefitting from well-lit pathways⁶.

In terms of process, it appears the accelerated timeline of this project (as compared to the others in the queue) is related to resident concerns about pedestrian safety from Shady Grove Metro to communities abutted by Crabbs Branch, Needwood and Redland. A brief review of the Streetlights page of MCDOT's Traffic Engineering and Operations Section⁷, provides information about reporting a broken streetlight, new installations, upgrades, and specifications. Since this supplemental appropriation is related to a new installation, ORESJ reviewed the considerations for new light installation⁸. While the seven-item list of

² <https://newarkcollaborative.org/blog/can-street-lighting-reduce-crime>

³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.4073/csr.2008.13>

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https://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/attachments/e95d751f7d91d0bcfeb209ddf6adcb4296868c12/store/cca92342e666b1ffb1c15be63b484e9b9687b57249dce44ad55ea92b1ec0/lights_04242016.pdf

⁵ <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p156-pub.pdf>

⁶ <https://newarkcollaborative.org/blog/can-street-lighting-reduce-crime>

⁷ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Traffic/streetlights.html>

⁸ https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Traffic/Resources/Files/PDF/streetlight_newinstalls.pdf

considerations is publicly available (in English), there's no information about how decisions or order of priority is determined once a petition is submitted. There is also no indication of broad-based community engagement about the petition process or other complaint requirements.

In addition, research and best practice is clear that complaint-based systems like those involved in this project request can create or perpetuate inequities in access and exacerbate negative outcomes (by preventing resources from being appropriately targeted). Recognition of inequities in complaint-based processes is apparent across the country, with jurisdictions shifting away from exclusively complaint-based systems towards establishing explicit goals and pilots that target resources to those most negatively impacted or burdened by the absence of a resources such as streetlighting:

- Oakland, CA: <https://www.oaklandca.gov/news/2019/oakdot-kicks-off-three-year-100-million-equity-focused-paving-plan>
- Dallas, TX: https://dallascityhall.com/departments/office-of-equity-and-inclusion/Equity/DCH%20Documents/COD_RacialEquityPlan22_Final.pdf
- Los Angeles, CA: <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/los-angeles-shines-a-streetlight-on-equity>
- Seattle, WA: <https://www.govtech.com/fs/how-streetlights-can-bridge-racial-gaps-in-cities.html> and https://youtu.be/T0k_ydKQdEo

It is ORESJ's recommendation that the County explore ongoing work in these jurisdictions, shift away from complaint-based systems, and create more equitable and transparent processes around resource distribution.

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive